



## Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).

## SAN GALGANO: A CISTERCIAN ABBEY OF THE MIDDLE AGES

FOR every student of monasticism the moment will come when, weary of following the general movement through its complicated stages of growth and power, he will turn into the bypaths of his subject in order to establish an immediate contact with the human lives which fed the orders with their boundless hopes and energies. Arrived at this point of view, he will do well to concentrate his attention on the origin and development of some typical foundation. By mastering its surviving records he may succeed not only in peopling the deserted dormitory and weed-choked garden with some semblance of forgotten life, but also in throwing a not unwelcome light on the whole movement of which the single monastery was a vital link. In the hope of bringing the perhaps greatest moral force of the twelfth century, the Cistercian reform, within the range of our common understanding, I venture to present in the following pages the story of an Italian offshoot of the famous French order, the story of the abbey of San Galgano.

In the rolling country of southern Tuscany, where the Merse River begins its winding course, lies the little town of Chiusdino, crowning a hill, which is remarkable, like almost all the domiciles of medieval men, by reason of its wide survey and splendid inaccessibility. In the twelfth century, when our story begins, Chiusdino with the neighboring hills and valleys belonged to the diocese of the bishop of Volterra, who, under the added title of count of the empire, exercised also civil authority in this region. Here, shortly after the year 1180, tidings of strange and miraculous import began to pass from mouth to mouth. The simple peasant-folk told one another as they sat before their doors at eventide or paced the road together to the neighboring market that a knight, Galgano by name and a citizen of Chiusdino, forswearing the delights of the flesh, had abandoned family and friends, that he had gone to dwell as an anchorite in the forest solitudes around his home, and that when, after a year of unexampled hardships, he had died and been buried, immediately, in sign of the favor which he enjoyed with the Lord, wonderful cures began to be effected at his tomb. Presently a pious stream of pilgrimage began to flow toward Monte Siepi, as the wooded hill was called which was the scene of the good man's rigor-

ous self-discipline, as well as the place of his burial.<sup>1</sup> This spontaneous veneration, which has numerous counterparts throughout Europe and brings home to us the passionate attachment of medieval folk to all the material manifestations of holiness, not only met with no opposition on the part of the church, but shortly received the highest possible endorsement through an act of the pope—probably of the year 1185—elevating the Chiusdino knight and hermit to the ranks of the saints. Naturally the reputation of the newly canonized Galgano was sedulously nursed by the leading dignitary of the region, the bishop of Volterra, who, beginning with the erection of a simple shrine over the grave of his late subject, gradually formed the ambitious plan of making the new cult serve as the basis for a great monastic foundation. He communicated with the Cistercian brothers, whose reputation and influence were just then spreading in steadily widening circles over central Europe, with the result that a few monks, apparently Frenchmen hailing from the home of Saint Bernard, from Clairvaux itself, settled in the unpeopled solitudes of Monte Siepi. Thus the first step was taken in the creation of the abbey of San Galgano.

A *cartularium*, preserved in the archives of Florence and containing the privileges conceded to the new foundation by temporal and spiritual rulers, supplemented by abundant material to be found in the Archivio di Stato of Siena, makes it possible to develop an accurate picture of the growth of the settlement on Monte Siepi.<sup>2</sup> The oldest existing document is of the year 1191; it was issued from the chancellery of Emperor Henry VI., and declared that the sovereign, probably at the instigation of Hildebrand, bishop of Volterra, who signed as a witness, took the monks of San Galgano hailing from Clairvaux under his high protection. He added the gift of a field *juxta abbatiam* and solemnly warned all neighbors not to "violate our munificence with temerarious audacity".<sup>3</sup> The imperial shelter, good so far as it went, needed to be supplemented by the much more valuable, because more constant, protection of the local lord. That was the bishop of Volterra, who as inaugurator of the settlement was not likely to withhold a liberal support. Accordingly, in the year 1201, Bishop Hildebrand, recapitulating, we are led to surmise, a number of earlier grants, issued a comprehensive privi-

<sup>1</sup> On the story of San Galgano, see Rondoni, *Tradizioni Popolari e Leggende di un Comune Medioevale*, p. 110 ff.

<sup>2</sup> The Siense material is in three large folio volumes, called *caleffi*, and consists of about 2250 documents. This material, together with the *cartularium* at Florence, has been consulted and in part published by Canestrelli in his excellent *L'Abbazia di San Galgano*, to which I am deeply indebted.

<sup>3</sup> Canestrelli, *Documento* V.

lege, in which, after enumerating a long list of fields and forests made over by him to a certain Bono and a band of monks, he not only took the brothers under his protection, but promised them complete liberty in their internal affairs together with freedom from taxation.<sup>4</sup> Evidently the foundation, favored and enriched by the bishop, assured of a friendly interest by the emperor, was advancing rapidly. To complete its legal safeguarding nothing was lacking according to medieval ideas except the word of the pope. It was not till the year 1206, fifteen years after the emperor had spoken in the matter and five years after the deed of Bishop Hildebrand, that Pope Innocent III. issued a bull declaring his good will toward the enterprise in the remote hills of the upper Merse. Under Innocent III., it will be remembered, the pretensions of the papacy to universal rule were stretched to the utmost. The increase of monasteries, representing each one the lighting of a new hearth of religious and, more particularly, of papal influence, must have been deeply to his liking. When he spoke, therefore, though he spoke tardily, he poured out for the monks of San Galgano a veritable cornucopia of bounties. In the first place, the head of the monastery—apparently Bono, the earliest leader of the Cistercian enterprise of whom there is record, had by this time passed away—was no longer designated as priest, or prior, or by some other title indicative of small beginnings, but as abbot, the dignity reserved for the chief official of a perfected and influential organization. Proceeding, Innocent confirmed all the possessions of the monks; reiterated their freedom from taxation and immunity from sentences pronounced in the courts of a bishop or any lay lord whatsoever; and proclaimed their right to elect their own abbot and to govern themselves, practically as a sovereign body.<sup>5</sup> The new monastic venture, dedicated to the high task of spreading civilization through the sparsely settled wilds of the upper Merse, was now as secure as the formal authorities of feudal society could make it.

However, no amount of official sanction could contribute greatly to the development of a monastery, if the institution did not perform effective service in the society in which it was situated, or if it failed to enlist the sympathies and support of all classes of the population. Only if these conditions were satisfied could San Galgano hope to arouse the pride and become identified with the patriotism of the neighborhood, thus winning recruits for its ranks and stimulating the stream of private contributions necessary for

<sup>4</sup> Canestrelli, *Documento* II.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, *Documento* XII.

the realization of its Christian programme. Following the Cistercian ideal this programme consisted not only in the creation of a retreat for holy men, but also in genuine pioneer labors, such as the clearing of forests and the bringing of unbroken land under the plough. In all these respects the success of our monastery in the first flush of its hopeful youth was conspicuous. The sons of the neighborhood came in such numbers to knock for admission at the portals of the house of peace that whatever slight French character the personnel of the first group of monks may have had was presently lost to make room for a genuine Tuscan foundation. Admitted within the walls the fugitives from a world of empty honors were, after due probation, apportioned to one of two classes: either they became spiritual brothers, who, as priests, served the mass and attended to the duties pertaining to religion, or they joined the *conversi* or lay brothers who tilled the fields and performed the various kinds of manual labor required in connection with the operation of a busy farmstead.

In a society where men gladly give their lives to a cause conceived as worthy, they hesitate even less in offering of their plenty. Gifts of land, bounties of all kinds, of which the record still exists, were showered upon the abbey. While these benefactions testify to the profound conviction of the Middle Ages regarding the usefulness of an institution which no longer awakens our enthusiasm, their form betrays the peculiar and, to our taste, somewhat unctuous piety of the period. According to medieval theology a gift to the church was a good work, especially remarked by God and sure to be taken into account on the day of reckoning. For this reason the clergy could, with perfectly good conscience moreover, stimulate the charitable instincts of the laity. Something of this desire to acquire credit with the Lord, palliated by a child-like candor, reaches us from the old deeds of hand. In the year 1196, for instance, Matilda, described as daughter of the departed Ugolinus and derelict of Guidaldonius, and the first private donor of whom there is record, presents the monks with a farmland, because "whoever shall contribute to sacred and venerable places shall receive a hundred-fold and have eternal life": on which exordium she adds, with simple-hearted readiness to lay bare every fold of her heart, that she hopes by means of her gift to save her soul and that of her relatives, doubtless the departed Ugolinus and Guidaldonius aforesaid.<sup>6</sup> Many bequests came to the brothers from neighboring Siena and her prosperous merchants. We hear of one commer-

<sup>6</sup> Canestrelli, *Documento* I.

cial citizen, a certain Andrea di Giacomo, who left as much as a thousand lire (*librae*), a very considerable sum, for the purchase of a farm with the direction that the product thereof be distributed among the poor. If this is charity at all times and the world over, Andrea clearly sounds the note of his age when he adds a bequest of eight hundred lire for the purchase of a second farm to be given to the monks on the condition that they daily recite a mass for the repose of his soul.<sup>7</sup> Let one more example suffice to depict both the gifts and the givers. In the year 1287, a citizen of Massa, after leaving twelve hundred lire to San Galgano, adds a gift of four hundred lire "for the construction of an altar in the said church in honor of the blessed Virgin Mary and the saints James, Christopher, and Nicholas, near which altar let my name be written in *patentibus lictoris* (in large letters!), in order that all the priests who celebrate mass at that altar may be reminded to pray for my soul and to make mention of my name in the service".<sup>8</sup> Although a charity, associated with such intense spiritual profit-seeking, may kindle an amused smile upon our lips, it furnishes no occasion to treat it with contempt. When all is said the fact remains that the habit of giving of one's substance for an unselfish end was widespread, and that it testifies to the success with which the church infused the spirit of idealism into a dull and brutalized society.

We have seen that Bono and his small Cistercian band made their home near the grave of San Galgano on Monte Siepi. They built there the circular chapel which still stands, and added a dormitory and other quarters, parts of which survive in the two wings leaning upon the chapel like awkward buttresses. Presently the donations of which we have taken note began to pour in, and the brothers saw an opportunity for enlarging the circle of their activity. Dissatisfied with their narrow and primitive quarters on Monte Siepi, they resolved to descend from their wooded spur to the broad meadow immediately at its foot, and to commence a second structure on a scale which more adequately represented the accumulated means and golden prospects of the monastery. The information as to this removal afforded by the documents is unfortunately slight, but, piecing together various items, we arrive at the conclusion that the new edifices were begun about the year 1224,<sup>9</sup> while still existing walls and lines of masonry enable us to affirm that they included, besides the great abbey church, a dormitory, a cloister, a refectory, barns, stables, and all the various offices of a corporation which,

<sup>7</sup> Canestrelli, p. 72. The bequest is of the year 1274.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 73.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 69-75.

if primarily a religious retreat, had also something of the character of a library, a school and a great agricultural establishment. By accidents and changes, to which I shall return in due time, most of the accessory structures have been swept away, but the great abbey church still stands, desolate and in ruins, it is true, but touched with such enduring beauty that it may be called without hesitation one of the most exquisite churches of Tuscany and even of all Italy. Built in slow stages, as suited the gradually accumulating means of the brothers, it was probably not finished till the end of the century which saw the laying of the corner-stone. In the place of ascertained facts, enabling us to compose a secure narrative of the construction of the famous church, we must content ourselves with conjecture, and conjecture, too, is the only answer to our eager question concerning the names of the great artists who drew the plans for it. Without doubt they were Cistercian monks, for the Cistercians, apart from their jealous desire to keep their buildings in their own hands, were recognized as the architectural leaders and innovators of their day. However, when we appeal to the documents for the names of the individual monks who distinguished themselves in this great enterprise, we are denied an answer, and must content ourselves with the general conclusion that the order built the abbey church of San Galgano. Considering the nature of the order, and remembering that men entered it to lose their personality in the hope of finding it again in the Lord, we can hardly quarrel with the accident which produced a result so fully in accord with the profound spirit of the institution.<sup>10</sup>

On one very fascinating matter included in the dark chapter of construction and involving the much-mooted question of the style of the great abbey church, it is possible to speak with precision, for the building being still in existence, at least as regards its structural lines, furnishes all the material necessary for an intelligent opinion. No student of art standing before these remains will fail to be struck with the fact that here is an edifice of such pure Gothic as is not to be found again in all Tuscany. Indeed these lithe and graceful forms would not be held to be out of place if one came upon them suddenly on a tour through northern France. Were the architects, whom we have agreed to be Cistercians, also Frenchmen, imported when the resolution was first taken to begin the edifice? The general plan, as well as the grouped piers and the ribbed vaults, point to that conclusion, although Canestrelli, patriotically

<sup>10</sup> Canestrelli, pp. 77-78, names some of the builders (*operai*), who not improbably figured also in the capacity of architects.

eager to vindicate the monument for his own people, affirms with some show of proof that Italian architects were quite capable of this quality of work. That Italian influences are perceptible here and there is undeniable, but the structural skeleton with its harmonious system of concentrated strains and balanced thrusts is so emphatically French that we are forced to conclude that, if men of French blood did not build this church, the Italian monks, entrusted with the work, must have received their architectural training in France, if not directly by residence in the Burgundian houses of their order, at least indirectly through the agency of the traditions accumulated in the earlier Cistercian foundations in Italy, such as Fossanova and Casamari.

During the thirteenth century, while the monks were engaged upon the reconstruction of the abbey on a monumental scale, they remained a vigorous and growing organization. It is an old observation that an ideal, devotedly pursued, almost magically creates the energies necessary for its fulfillment. The thirteenth century, therefore, constitutes the abbey's heyday, marked not only by the loud and steady ring of hammer and chisel, which came across the meadow of the Merse and sounded through the encircling woods, but also by the quality of the converts attracted by the cloistered life. Nothing is more erroneous than the common notion that it was the broken and unfit, the sad company of life's derelict, who were drawn to the medieval monasteries. Undeniably this defeated section of society might be found in large numbers in a given institution in the period of its decay, but in its flourishing time, which was of course the time of youth, its programme, universal enough to reach the operative as well as the reflective temperament, laid a spell upon the best minds of the day. Turn as one will, there is no way of accounting for the part played by the monasteries in medieval civilization, save on the ground that their ranks constituted a representative expression of the intelligence and energy of society. San Galgano bears out this assertion at every point. We have already seen that when the monks undertook to build themselves an abbey, which still, though in ruins, communicates the most delicate spirit of beauty, they did not have to go for help outside their own cowed brotherhood. By the side of the architects, and wearing like them the yoke of monastic obedience, were to be found trained lawyers and notaries. With its varied business the monastery could turn them to good use and was at pains to assemble for their behoof a considerable law library.<sup>11</sup> Physicians and surgeons, who in their

<sup>11</sup> Canestrelli, *Documento* XVIII.



youth had trudged on foot to the schools of Salerno and Montpellier, paced the quiet garden walks with ordained priests, expert in the lore of Saint Thomas Aquinas and the Schoolmen. With such elements represented in the remote community, we can hardly go wrong in assuming that its intellectual level rose far beyond that of contemporary lay society. How else shall we account for the fact that the neighboring city of Siena frequently requested the aid of the monastery in purely civic affairs? With the commune's growth the office of treasurer acquired an increasing importance, and when the citizens wanted a thoroughly capable and reliable man to put in charge of their moneys, whither did they turn but to the abbot of San Galgano? They asked for the loan of one of the monks, for the first time, it would seem, in the year 1257, and were so satisfied with the service they received that they kept up the practice for almost a hundred years.<sup>12</sup> Then they resorted to a layman, indicating in plain terms that it was not until the democratic government had been established for some generations that the average citizen acquired those moral and mental qualities which put him on a level with the monks. A quaint memorial of these comptroller-monks, called *camarlinghi di Biccherna*, is carefully preserved in the archives of Siena. On certain of the painted covers of the account-books which they kept in their time will be found the solemn countenance of a cowed brother, who thus still seems to guard from his grave the treasure entrusted to his care while living. Nor was the treasurership the only office by means of which Siena paid tribute to the high character of the Galgano fraternity. In the thirteenth century the chief public enterprise in which she was engaged was her cathedral, for great buildings both for civil and ecclesiastical uses were one of the passions of the age. Encouraged probably by the splendid success with which the monks were raising their own abbey, the municipality entrusted the erection of the *duomo* to their tried and skilful hands. Through the second half of the thirteenth century Fra Vernaccio, Fra Melano, Fra Villa and other brothers—empty, featureless names furnished by the stolid records—were at the head of the works, and during their incumbency the magnificent pile was, in all essential respects, given the form which still meets the eye.<sup>13</sup>

Such services rendered by San Galgano to the commune of Siena indicate that the shuttle was flying back and forth, weav-

<sup>12</sup> Canestrelli, *Documento* XX., gives a list of the Sienese *camarlinghi* supplied by San Galgano.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, *Documento* XXI., gives the full list of monks who served as *operai* in connection with the Sienese cathedral.

ing a mutually profitable intimacy between the abbey and the city. In view of the general political situation of Tuscany in the thirteenth century this development was inevitable. The monks were men of peace; their object in the world, the works of peace. We have seen that in settling on the upper Merse they needed and had sought the protection of the established powers, the pope, the emperor and the bishop of Volterra. But with the death in the year 1250 of Frederick II., the last great Hohenstaufen, the empire, long threatened with decay, was definitely reduced to impotence, and though the pope tried to seize his rival's heritage, he failed, in Tuscany at least, because the cities of that province were resolute to appropriate for themselves whatever benefits resulted from the decay of the federal power. The bishop of Volterra, indeed, continued to play the part of a local sovereign, theoretically of considerable sway, but his glory waned as soon as he ceased to draw light and power from his feudal master. Thus Siena came to dominate in southern Tuscany over a region which included the Merse valley and therewith the abbey of San Galgano. Abbey and city did not fail to see the mutual advantage of a close political alliance. Siena, and Siena alone, could in the changed political circumstances of Italy offer to the abbey an adequate guarantee against violence and spoliation, and the abbey would give to the city an increased security on its southern frontier, in addition to conferring on it the honor which in a religious age attached to the patronage of a great ecclesiastical establishment.

Thus, under the pressure of time and change, San Galgano replaced the patronage of its earliest protectors with that of the neighboring commune. That great treasury of fact, the Sienese constitution of 1262, proclaims the relation in terms indicative of the large confidence of the young commonwealth. On entering upon his office the *potestà* of Siena was obliged to swear that he would diligently watch over the monastery of San Galgano and all its possessions, and, continuing, he was made to say that "at the demand of my lord abbot I shall give notice by messenger and letter to the lords and people of the region near which the possessions of the abbey are situated, that the said abbey and its goods are under the protection of the commune of Siena; and I shall extend the affectionate request to them that they inflict no injury upon it or any of its goods, seeing that we of Siena are held to aid the monks and to defend them from wrong as if they were our fellow-citizens."<sup>14</sup> And this promise of protection was anything but hollow. The lords

<sup>14</sup> Zdekauer, *Il Constituto di Siena di 1262*, I. 103.

of the neighborhood, as well as such small but often violent communities as Chiusdino and Grosseto, wisely kept their hands off the abbot's possessions, and the abbey continued to flourish till the arrival of its evil day.

The thirteenth century, I have already said, was the prosperous period of the Cistercian order in Italy and, particularly, of its offspring near the grave of San Galgano. Then gradually signs of decay appeared. The phenomenon has its parallel in the story of every spiritual institution evolved by the children of men. The monks, raised by wealth above the necessity of effort, became estranged from their own ideals and gave themselves to idleness and vice. Just as the Cistercians themselves originated in a protest against the decay of the older Benedictines, so another revolt, ripening with the action of time, was certain to direct itself against Cistercian self-satisfaction, and to gather the most promising and candid spirits of the age in new affiliations. This is the meaning of the rise of the begging friars. The noble orders founded by Saint Francis and Saint Dominic did not at once affect San Galgano, owing to the great and merited prestige which it enjoyed in its immediate neighborhood. But slowly, if imperceptibly, they exercised a disturbing influence on what we may call the recruiting market of our monastery, for, in entering the field to bid against the older institutions, they exercised an irresistible attraction upon all the more strenuous spirits by virtue of their youthfulness and fire. Early in the fourteenth century, about the time when the new abbey in the meadow under Monte Siepi celebrated its first centenary, one catches signs suggesting that its moral tone has suffered. For one thing Siena ceased to look to it for architects and *camarlinghi*. That may have been, as I have already hinted, because lay society had at last advanced to the point where it could trust itself for these services, but, on the other hand, the suspicion cannot be dismissed that the services could no longer be rendered. In any case the usefulness of the institution decreased, and with the usefulness the efficiency of the residents. An ominous silence gathered around San Galgano, the silence descending upon a society which has outlived its time, and when it is broken by confused sounds of war and panic, drawing our attention once more to the upper Merse, we are brought face to face with disaster.

In the second half of the fourteenth century Italy was visited by one of the most abominable social plagues with which the much tormented peninsula was vexed during the long agony of feudalism. It consisted in the so-called Companies of Adventure. Since the

central authority, still nominally represented by the emperor across the Alps, was destroyed, and ambitious local powers, lords and cities, quarreled fiercely for dominion, a chaotic condition was created, marked by almost uninterrupted petty warfare and furnishing lucrative employment for large bands of mercenary soldiers. The leaders of these bands were not slow to see that with the decay of the various city militias, a decay which was in full swing by the middle of the fourteenth century, they really held Italian society at their mercy. With the dregs of all Europe gathered under their banners, they impudently ravaged the Sienese country around the walls, and squeezed incalculable sums out of the frightened burghers. Of course the rich abbey lands of San Galgano fell a helpless prey to the adventurers, who again and again spread over them in insolent ease, not unlike a devastating cloud of locusts. The chroniclers assure us that the worst of the plunderers of the beautiful Cistercian settlement was the Englishman, Sir John Hawkwood, nothing more than a successful brigand according to our mild standards, but rewarded with royal honors in an age when he and his like commanded the most powerful armed forces of society. Hawkwood, employed by Florence to do the fighting for which the burghers, with their attention concentrated on trade and profits, had lost the taste, was cheered as if he were the shepherd David by the Florentine populace, and when he died received the extraordinary honor of being painted on horseback over the inner portal of the Florentine cathedral. There he still rides exalted over the worshippers, clamorously preaching in the impressive silence of Christ's temple the world-old doctrine of the mailed fist. Hawkwood, under engagement to Florence, was of course free to harry the territory of Siena. His practice, as well as that of other *condottieri* who visited the Merse valley, was to establish himself with headquarters at San Galgano, and then burn, rob and devastate within a radius of many miles.<sup>15</sup> The scenes which occurred everywhere in the Middle Ages, when a lawless horde burst upon a defenseless population, put a tax upon the imagination of a humanitarian age like ours. Hawkwood's first visit to San Galgano befell in the year 1365, and many visits by him and others of his kind followed in the succeeding generation. When the pest of the adventurous companies was at last eradicated and better times dawned, the monastery was in a state of complete disorganization. In 1397 the then abbot, one Lodovico di Tano, was constrained to sell a piece of land in order to pay a papal imposition. He found a purchaser, but could

<sup>15</sup> Muratori, XV., *Cronica Sanese*, 187, 189.

not meet the legal requirements for perfecting the bargain, because the monks, whose consent was indispensable, were all dispersed. The abbot dwelt alone in the deserted halls of the great monastery.<sup>16</sup>

With the return of tranquillity in the fifteenth century San Galgano experienced a revival. Enough monks returned to form a new nucleus, the offices were chanted as of old, and the damage done by the Companies of Adventure was gradually repaired. But the former splendor never returned. The melancholy story of the decline to the point of abandonment and ruin that now meets the eye is written legibly enough in the records, but can only be briefly indicated here. Before the new and vital interests which the Renaissance, now mounting to its meridian, popularized throughout Italy, the monastic idea began to pale. San Galgano, buried among thick woods in a remote valley, did not bulk so large as in a simpler age. Its revenues were still considerable, but its ranks represented a descending curve of efficiency and were no longer crowded with cheerful and self-sacrificing volunteers. The abbey worried along, however, as vested interests will, until presently it fell a victim to one of the growing diseases of the Roman system, the cancer of prelacy. With the passion for a princely scale of living, which the Renaissance fastened upon the Roman pontiffs, went the need of a court, of gorgeous palaces and of a numerous retinue of sycophants to shine as minor lights around the central sun. To meet the multifarious demands upon their budget the popes were driven to tap such questionable sources of income as the sale of indulgences, while to satisfy the covetous and luxurious prelates they were constrained to assign to them the revenues of fat bishoprics and abba-cies. San Galgano, a rich foundation close at hand, was not likely to escape the general fate. In the year 1503 Pope Julius II., one of the most imposing personalities of the whole line of popes, but, as ill-luck would have it, always desperately in need of cash, gave the abbey *in commendam* to one of his cardinals. On the surface the transaction signified no more than that the abbey was "commended" to the cardinal's paternal care; in reality it appropriated the entire revenue to his personal use. Whether the abbey was to be kept up depended henceforth on the distant commendatary's charity, supplemented by the begging talents of the monks. Some monks of an adventurous temper might still be inclined to take their chances with the institution under the nefarious absentee system, but they had no legal claim to anything. Their money flowed to Rome, and once at Rome was past reclaiming.

<sup>16</sup> Canestrelli, p. 21.

There is no reason for following closely the miserable tale of decay under the successive commendataries, though the story is not without its element of pathos. In the year 1576 a papal inspector, sent on a tour through Tuscany, found a single monk acting as caretaker of the vast establishment, reflecting in his rags the crying destitution of the monastery.<sup>17</sup> The inspector reported to Rome that the refectory was without a roof, that many chapels were in decay, that of the four bells three could not be rung, and that through the broken windows the birds entered and made their nests in the church. In the year 1632 the pope, himself scandalized at the results of a prolonged exploitation but incapable of devising an effective policy of reform, reduced the dishonored monastery from its dignity of abbey, and, twenty years after, secularized it by organizing it as a simple benefice. The benefice, however, embracing the many estates which San Galgano had accumulated through the ages, produced an undiminished revenue, and this revenue continued to flow into the hands of a commendatary, who in return for an unmerited bounty assumed the meagre obligation of maintaining Christian worship in the cathedral and of making a few repairs at his discretion. The Cistercian order now definitely left the place which was associated with a not inglorious chapter of its past. The commendatary, looking for cheap labor, sent first some Vallombrosans, and later, occasional Franciscans to act as custodians of the edifice, but these uninterested guardians, drawing an infinitesimal wage, were glad if they could eke out a living without giving a thought to the maintenance of the splendid monument in whose ample enclosure they must have felt overwhelmed by a sense of their own insignificance.

And so we arrive through the long and painful stages of neglect at the last phase, the chapter of total abandonment. On January 22, 1786, a congregation of perhaps fifty peasants was gathered in the sacristy before the only altar which seems to have been kept in sufficient repair for the celebration of the mass. The rest of the edifice, we are informed, had become frightfully damp and unwholesome, owing to the fact that whenever it rained the water poured through the roof like a sieve. Suddenly on that January day "all' atto della consecrazione",<sup>18</sup> at the moment when the Franciscan caretaker and priest consecrated the bread, there came a tremendous roar, followed by a shock which threw the terrified worshipers upon their knees. The bell-tower, which rose just behind the sacristy and,

<sup>17</sup> Canestrelli, *Documento* XXVIII.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 61.

as was usual in Italy, stood free of the church, had given way and crashed to the ground. It must have seemed to the witnesses like a divine intervention that, instead of burying them under its ruins in the sacristy, it had measured its length upon the open field behind the choir. After this catastrophe neither peasants nor caretaker would trust themselves in the dilapidated edifice. They got leave to transfer the worship, maintained in the crumbling abbey for the convenience of the scattered peasants of the neighborhood, to Monte Siepi, and the venerable though neglected round chapel, which marked the grave of San Galgano and had served as the original settlement of the Cistercians, was once more supplied with an altar and rang with the solemn music of the liturgy. To this day, on Sundays and other Christian festivals, it is visited by a thin congregation of silent, stoical-looking peasants, attended by their wives and children. With the withdrawal of the priest and his flock a formal deconsecration was required by the regulations of the church in sign that the great abbey was left to perish in peace. The bishop of Volterra, in whose diocese the abbey lay, in due time published the necessary decree, and on August 10, 1789, the pertinent ceremony was gone through with by two commissioners, accompanied by a notary to make the necessary legal attestation. It is interesting to observe that just six days before, some hundreds of miles away across the snow-capped barrier of the Alps, a body of Frenchmen, calling themselves the National Assembly, had swept the remnants of feudalism out of existence and inaugurated for Europe a new age, founded upon the bold belief, no less than blasphemous to the medieval mind, of the ability of reason to effect the salvation of the human race. The chronological coincidence, linking the far-sounding pronouncement made on the Parisian stage with the abandonment unwept, unsung, of a monument which had its root in the warm heart of the Middle Ages, touches the imagination. *Sunt lachrymæ rerum.*

Neglected since the days of the Renaissance by greedy and conscienceless commendataries, the doomed abbey was from the moment of deconsecration left unguarded and untenanted, a prey to the conquering elements. Not long before the tower came down in the manner we have seen, a cardinal commendatary, Feroni by name, had managed to persuade the pope to transfer the whole property of San Galgano as a private estate to his family, with the sole obligation of contributing to the maintenance of religious worship in the abbey. When the tower fell the family, in return for fitting up the chapel on Monte Siepi, got the maintenance clause abolished. The dis-

avowal of the edifice was now complete ; as far as the law was concerned, the owners were free to look upon the ancient monument as a useless encumbrance amidst their pleasant fields and meadows, and nothing hindered them from destroying it at pleasure. While balking at this extreme step, they freely resorted to it as a quarry, and the peasants, following the example of their enlightened masters, plundered it at will for such building material as their need required. Whenever a vault fell in, bullock carts rolled lumberingly to the scene to appropriate the fine blocks of travertine which littered the ground, and a heap of indistinguishable rubbish might be the only evidence of the existence of the abbey at this day, if the Italian government, sluggishly responding to the indignant appeal of a devoted lover of his country's history and art, had not, in the year 1894, stayed further demolition by declaring the ruin a national monument and by making meagre provision for its preservation.

Hardly a building testifying to the character and splendor of the Italian past is more worthy of close study than the ruined abbey of San Galgano. Unvisited by the casual tourist by reason of its remoteness from the common highways of travel, utterly untouched by the many vulgar influences of modern life, it has gathered about itself the atmosphere of silence which settles upon all noble works. On an afternoon in June, abandoning the hot and dusty post-road which I had followed for some hours, I mounted a grassy bank, and across a sun-lit meadow saw it lying, white and glittering like the gates of pearl. Around the level field, from whose thick clover came the riotous song of summer mounting to its acme, stood the wooded hills, grave and watchful. To the west, its defiant outline almost obliterated by the strong light, rose the cliff of Chiusdino. Fronting the lofty citadel and close at hand lay gently-sloping Monte Siepi with the purple roof of the old round chapel just visible above the tree-tops. Here at last in the silence of the white summer afternoon, broken only by the voices in the grass and the faint, clear call of the cuckoo, the long story of the monastery became perfectly intelligible by being lifted out of the conditions of material fact into the realm of beauty. To the wakeful inner vision will always come a moment when things, born in time, assume the aspect of eternity. From that westward rock, its sharp lines dissolving in the sun, had the knight Galgano ridden forth upon his quest of God, his golden hair, of which the legend tells, waving in the wind ; in these peaceful hills had he wandered, carrying his heart in his hands like a sacrifice ; and here, on brooding Monte Siepi, earth had gathered the exhausted body like a leaf of the dead year. Presently over the grave had



risen the round chapel of the Cistercian brotherhood and, in the due course of time, built of the prayers of men, the abbey yonder, lifting a pure front above the meadow. Even so. The crickets rehearse the tale to the cicadas shrilling in the hedges, the thrush and cuckoo inform the hills, which, when evening falls, will hold silent conference with the marching stars.

Just before sunset I entered the portal and stood in the deserted nave. The vaults had fallen in, disclosing the blue sky covered with a web of delicate rose vapor. A few blocks of weathered travertine, which had lately given way, littered the grassy floor. At the entrance to the transept a brilliant patch of yellow marked a bed of buttercups, graciously planted by some wandering wind. At either hand the eye followed the rows of piers till it rested upon the marred choir wall with its ghostly apertures. Finer clustered columns one may not hope to find, each one composed of perfectly articulated members, simple, serviceable and beautiful. Equally simple, with an added grace of subtle rhythm, are the triforium and clere-story. If this was Italian workmanship it was at least directed by the delicate Gothic spirit which emanated from the Isle de France. In the days when the ribbed vault terminated the nave and aisles, the church must have produced an effect as rounded and complete as a sonata by some great master. But if completeness has been lost, its absence is not noticed by reason of a quality much more moving to us in our character of men, a quality which Wordsworth has called "the unimaginable touch of time". Daily as the light fails from the sky and dusk gathers within the spacious enclosure, time, and its kindred spirit, beauty, circle like great birds above the deserted home of men.

FERDINAND SCHEVILL.